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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a policy framework for the implementation of goals for special education in Michigan. The first part of the paper is a memorandum that recommends the policy framework. Attachment A presents goals for providing a support system to students with disabilities to foster their progress in the general curriculum. Goals include: (1) aligning administrative rules for special education with federal regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including Parts B (preschool services) and C (early intervention); (2) supporting provision of inclusive preschool services; (3) integrating planning and service delivery for schoolwide models of early intervention for at-risk students; (4) having individual student characteristics guide the individual education program planning process; (5) supporting teachers and practitioners; (6) ensuring current research and proven practices guide personnel development; (7) supporting parent involvement; (8) supporting administrative flexibility; (9) using standards of quality for delivery of early intervention and preschool services; and (10) holding schools accountable for effective service delivery and student performance. Detailed steps are provided for reaching each of the goals. A sampling of current contexts and findings related to the policy framework are presented in Attachment B, and goals for early childhood special education and transition and adult services are provided in Attachment C. (CR)

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Arthur E. Ellis

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December 10, 1999

MEMORANDUM

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Arthur E. Ellis

SUBJECT: Approval of Policy Framework for the Implementation of Goals for Special Education

A policy framework for the implementation of goals for special education is presented in Attachment A. This builds upon components for systemic improvement previously completed by the State Board of Education. Within the current context of education reform there are many implications for special education; a sampling of current contexts and findings related to the policy framework are presented in Attachment B.

In 1998, the State Board of Education adopted Goals for Special Education, including goals for early childhood special education and goals for transition and adult services (Attachment C). In April 1999, the Board adopted policies for transition and adult services to age 26 (Attachment D). These actions constitute steps toward the adoption of a complete policy framework which supports improvement in the special education delivery system and improved results for students.

To complete a policy framework, policies are needed in the areas of early intervention services, early childhood special education, as well as for the K-12 (ages 6-21) system. Collectively, these policies and those previously adopted for transition and adult services constitute a complete policy framework for improvement in special education.

The foundation for a policy framework in special education improvement is guided by several sources. These include:

1. State Board of Education Action Plan Priorities and current Strategic Initiatives (June,1999).

2. The 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the implementing regulations, published March 12, 1999.

3. Current research and findings on teaching and learning as related to students with disabilities.

4. The findings of the State Board of Education which result from the waiver process to the Administrative Rules (MCL 380.1281 (3)).

5. The 1996 staff analysis of the Special Education Delivery System Task Force Report.

6. Current data on the special education delivery system in Michigan including student performance (State Improvement Plan, October, 1998).

7. Standards-based reform priorities for improving student achievement.

In order to address the policies which are guided by these sources, it is necessary to identify the conditions which must be considered as essential to improving the special education delivery system. These include:

1. Investments in teacher and practitioner quality as well as an adequate supply of teachers and related services personnel.

2. Investments in a balanced system of accountability, with particular focus on student outcomes.

3. Investments in prevention and early intervention to reduce the incidence of low academic achievement and subsequent referral for special education services.

4. Investments in community and family involvement to support the unique needs of students with disabilities.

It is recommended that the State Board of Education approve the policy framework for the implementation of goals for special education as described in the Superintendent's memorandum dated December 10, 1999.

ATTACHMENT A

Michigan State Board of Education
Policy Framework for the Implementation of Goals for Special Education
December 1999

A policy framework for implementing the State Board of Education goals for special education is based on a commitment to a performance-based education system which is responsible to the needs of all children and youth, including those with disabilities. In such a system, all children reap the benefits of public education through effective, research-based instruction and practices which are grounded upon equitable standards and high expectations for all.

Special education is a support system to students with disabilities to foster their progress in the general curriculum. The general education environment, curriculum, and assessments are accepted as the starting point in designing individualized educational programs for students with disabilities. Attention is given to technology and other assistive options to support the teaching-learning process. Resources within the family, school and the community are utilized efficiently to support the total educational process.

Accountability is achieved through a balanced approach to inputs and system design, assurance of procedural safeguards, demonstration of compliance with state and federal requirements, and most importantly through performance expectations and documentation of student outcomes.

In order to:

1) achieve the priorities of the State Board of Education;

2) meet the requirements of the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;

3) reflect the findings of current research on child development, the impact of disability, and the teaching-learning process;

4) reflect the findings on the current state of special education in Michigan; and

5) incorporate a performance- and standards-based accountability structure for special education, the following policies shall be adopted.

Alignment with Federal Statutory and Regulatory Framework

1. Administrative Rules for special education must align with federal regulations for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as published in the Federal Register on March 12, 1999.

Impact:

- Michigan administrative rules for special education will support the requirements of federal law.
- Redundant or out-dated administrative rules will be rescinded

Support for Early Intervention Services (Birth through Age 2)

2. Administrative Rules for special education must align with Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for early intervention services to eligible infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

Impact:

- A single plan of services for infants and toddlers with disabilities will be created utilizing an Individualized Family Service Plan, as required under the IDEA, instead of an Individualized Education Plan.
- A single system of procedural safeguards will be adopted, replacing the dual system currently impacting the delivery of services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

Support for Preschool Services (Ages 3-5)

3. Administrative Rules for special education must align with Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), for preschool services to children ages 3-5 with disabilities.

Impact:

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- As allowed under the IDEA, an Individualized Family Service Plan may be considered as a planning document for a child with a disability.

4. The Administrative Rules for special education and pupil accounting shall support the provision of preschool services to children with disabilities in locations or settings where young children without disabilities access early childhood education programs and services.

Impact:

- Flexibility in the location of the delivery of preschool services will be supported through Administrative Rules and funding guidelines.

Support for Early Identification and Intervention to Reduce Academic Failure in the Early Grades

5. Integration of planning and service delivery shall be supported, within the parameters of federal statutes and regulations, for schoolwide models of early identification and intervention for students demonstrating low achievement and potential for referral to special education services.

Impact:

- Administrative Rules for special education and pupil accounting will not create any disincentives to schoolwide practices.

- The State Board of Education will be requested to recommend to the State Legislature that current more restrictive language in the state aid act be replaced with language which aligns with federal language for flexible use of federal funds for schoolwide programs.

- Using integrated schoolwide improvement strategies, schools will have the opportunity to support student achievement and to reduce academic failure which leads to increases in long-term special education services.

Support for Student-centered and Achievement-focused Educational Programs

6. Individual student characteristics guide the individual education program planning process.

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Impact:

- Functional assessment of student strengths and needs will be used to plan individualized education programs.

- Attention to curricular standards and benchmarks, as well as performance expectations for functional independence, will be emphasized.

- Categorical labels of disability will not determine scope or location of special education services.

Support for Teachers and Practitioners

7. Teachers and practitioners are supported with access to continuous learning, appropriate technology, aids, and supports to effectively engage in the teaching-learning process for students with disabilities.

Impact:

- Administrators will focus resources on improving teaching and learning.

- Teachers and practitioners will use professional development opportunities to learn teaching practices that lead to improved student performance.

- Resources will support achievement for all students by providing instructional materials aligned to teaching and learning standards.

8. Current research and proven practices guide the support and delivery of pre-service and continuing personnel development as related to students with disabilities.

Impact:

- The Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services will work with the Office of Professional Preparation Services to update and align standards for teacher preparation with pre-K to 12 standards and benchmarks.

- The Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services will work across the department to clarify educational standards through guides and materials that link standards to instruction.

Support for Connecting Schools and Families

9. Parent involvement is supported in each student's educational program.

Impact:

- Parents and families will be welcomed as partners of school personnel in matters affecting their child's achievement and success in school.

Support for Administrators

10. Administrative flexibility is supported, in accordance with current research and best practice.

Impact:

- Local decision-making will be tied to school improvement and increased student performance.

Accountability

11. Standards of quality for the delivery of early intervention services for infants and toddlers, and preschool special education services, are used for quality assurance and accountability processes.

Impact:

- Standards will be integrated into a single Michigan Department of Education standards of quality document for early childhood programs and services.

- The document will be referenced in interagency agreements; partner agencies will be encouraged to utilize the standards.

12. Schools are held accountable for effective service delivery, compliance with state and federal regulations, and for student performance.

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Impact:

- A balanced accountability system which documents necessary system inputs, compliance and procedural requirements, and student performance measures shall be developed within the framework of a quality assurance review.

- Schools will be held accountable for each aspect of system performance, with varying levels of assistance provided through the department based on the results of the quality assurance review.

- Self-assessment, improvement strategies, and integration with local school improvement plans and accreditation process will be supported in addition to accountability for compliance findings.

- Attention to student outcomes will guide the accountability system; improved student performance will be expected.

ATTACHMENT B

Michigan State Board of Education
Context and Findings Guiding a Policy Framework for Special Education

Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education Services (Birth through Age 5)

1) Current State Board of Education priorities include a focus on early childhood education (State Board of Education Report, June 1999).

2) Children develop much of their capacity for learning in the first three years of life, when their brains grow to 90 percent of the eventual adult weight (Karoly et al, 1998).

3) The level to which the brain develops synaptic structures is dependent on experiences and interactions with people, places and things in the child's environment (Shore, 1997).

4) Early intervention for children at risk of developmental delay is a documented strategy for improving educational achievement (Bailey & Wolery, 1992).

5) Disability is an established risk condition for developmental delay and subsequent academic achievement (Shonkoff & Meisels, 1990).

6) Early intervention services for families of infants and toddlers with disabilities, and preschool services for young children with disabilities, are strategies supported through federal legislation and funding (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997).

7) Children identified with disabilities during the preschool years are those experiencing more severe levels of disability while children with more mild disabilities are far less likely to be identified before entering elementary school (Marder & Cox, 1991).

8) High quality preschool experiences improve readiness for successful transition to kindergarten and improve success in meeting formal learning expectations (Michigan School Readiness Evaluation Project, 1999).

K-12 Special Education Services (Ages 6 through 21)

1) Current State Board of Education priorities include a focus on raising student achievement, enhancing services to teachers to improve instruction, and connecting schools and families.

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2) Current policies and procedures for special education services in Michigan are not aligned with the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); the IDEA places new emphasis on student outcomes; the previous deficit model of evaluation and planning has been replaced with a functional assessment of student strengths and needs, and emphasis is on curricular standards and access to the general curriculum.

3) Requests and approvals for waivers to Administrative Rules, as allowed under MCL 380.1281 (3) have resulted in requests for administrative flexibility primarily in establishing classroom and caseload size (State Board of Education Report, September 1999).

4) Many of the recommendations presented to the State Board of Education in the 1996 staff analysis of the Special Education Delivery System Task Force Report are now reflected in the IDEA 1997 and its implementing regulations; other recommendations remain to be implemented.

5) Research in the teaching-learning process has documented many findings relative to identification of disability, appropriate assessment of student strengths and needs, and effective instructional strategies which are not yet universally applied.

6) Relative to system effectiveness and student performance, the State Improvement Plan for Special Education (October 1, 1998) and statewide monitoring findings (FY 1998-99) reveal the following:

- graduation and drop-out rates for students with disabilities are in need of improvement;
- certain students with disabilities remain segregated from their peers who do not have disabilities;
- students with disabilities in Michigan are in need of effective transition plans to guide their preparation for adult life roles;
- education programs for students with disabilities do not yet universally connect the student's education goals to the general curriculum;
- students with disabilities have not fully accessed the opportunity to measure educational progress through a statewide assessment system;
- students are referred to special education in late elementary school and middle school due to academic failure.

ATTACHMENT C

Michigan State Board of Education
Action Plan Priorities
and
Goals for Special Education
June 1998

Goals for Special Education:

Priority: Raise student achievement.

1. Increase the percentage of students with disabilities who graduate.

2. Decrease the percentage of students with disabilities who drop out of school.

3. Increase the participation and performance of students with disabilities in career and work force development programs.

4. Increase the participation and performance of students with disabilities on statewide assessments.

5. Develop guidelines for alternative assessments for students for whom participation on statewide assessments is not appropriate.

6. Reduce the number of students in need of special education due to academic failure.

7. Improve early identification and academic support for students at risk of requiring special education.

8. Reduce the number of minority students misplaced in special education.

Priority: Promote options designed to improve student achievement.

1. Identify, coordinate, and disseminate professional development resources which utilize research-based and proven curricular models and instructional strategies.

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2. Increase participation by local special education staff in school improvement planning and in the coordination of resources to support school improvement strategies.

3. Establish goals for the performance of children with disabilities.

4. Identify, coordinate, and disseminate information and training on functional and advanced learning opportunities.

5. Identify, coordinate, and disseminate information and training on positive behavioral intervention strategies which enhance the learning environment for all students.

6. Promote strategies for increased student and family involvement in each student's education.

7. Support policies and practices which improve coordination of services across agencies.

Priority: Hold students, schools, and districts accountable for improving student achievement.

1. Implement a system of quality assurance which coordinates required compliance monitoring and systemic improvement planning.

2. Develop district and building data profiles on special education student performance and system indicators.

3. Use the data profiles as an accountability measure and to generate local improvement plans.

4. Identify and provide technical assistance resources to schools and districts which have significant student and systemic needs, as identified by the district data profiles and improvement plans.

Priority: Update and upgrade teacher and administrator preparation.

1. Provide information and training on the restructuring of the special education system to college and university education faculties.

2. Coordinate periodic reviews of teacher preparation institutions through the Office of Professional Preparation Services to incorporate relevant elements of a restructured system of special education.

3. Support model sites for teacher training that provide preservice teachers enhanced on-site learning opportunities.

4. Review/revise personnel preparation requirements to support educational results for all students including students with disabilities.

5. Respond to supply and demand needs in special education and to the varied needs of an increasingly diverse population.

Goals for Early Childhood Special Education:

1. Improve and support parent involvement in early intervention and preschool special education services.

2. Improve interagency coordination of early intervention services and community supports for young children with disabilities and their families.

3. Assure that preschool children with disabilities are educated in settings with their peers to the extent appropriate.

4. Provide options for early childhood education placements for young children with disabilities.

5. Create a coordinated system of early intervention and preschool services. Use a single system of planning, due process, monitoring and quality assurance. Align Administrative Rules with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Goals for Students Aged 22-26:

1. Improve and support development of skills acquired through education to relevant community life.

2. Improve interagency coordination and involvement in transition from extended education to community life.

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3. Increase flexibility in the use of available funds to support innovation in the design and implementation of extended education and transition.

4. Increase the use of local, state, and federal resources for extended education and transition through matching funds, available reimbursements, and other options.

These goals assume the continuation of the birth-26 mandate for students with disabilities in Michigan. These goals also support development of innovative service delivery models and improved interagency collaboration for transition services.

ATTACHMENT D

Michigan State Board of Education
Transition Policies
April 1999

1. Beginning at age 14, for students with disabilities, transition planning and transition services constitute a major component of each student's individual education program.

2. For students with disabilities aged 22-26, transition is the primary focus of each student's individual education program.

3. Public schools function as the lead, but not exclusive agency in the development of transition services.

4. Public schools may contract with other public and private agencies for transition services as appropriate to meet the goals of each student's individual education program.

5. Community-based instruction shall be supported in special education and pupil accounting Rules.

6. Transition services may include services other than direct instruction and shall be supported in special education and pupil accounting Rules.